



**Testimony of Dr. Sarah Evans Zalewski on behalf of the Connecticut Counseling Association**

**PROPOSED BILL NO. 5321 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A STATE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE COVERAGE**

**Committee on Human Services**

**FEBRUARY 7, 2023**

Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, and esteemed members of the Committee on Human Services, my name is Dr. Sarah Evans Zalewski and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and President of the Connecticut Counseling Association. I am providing testimony on Proposed Bill No. 5321 An Act Establishing A State Ombudsman's Office For Behavioral Healthcare Coverage, on behalf of the Connecticut Counseling Association (CCA). The Connecticut Counseling Association is the only professional organization that represents the approximately 4500 Professional Counselors, 600 Professional Counselor Associates, and counseling graduate students here in Connecticut and is a branch of the American Counseling Association.

This proposed act is an important step toward addressing the urgent mental health needs of Connecticut residents. An integral part of acquiring mental health care is paying for it, and at this time there are several barriers that can make the process difficult. There are at times barriers for counselors to join insurance panels, communicate with the insurers in a timely fashion, and a significant concern regarding reimbursement rates from some carriers/plans. Furthermore, every counselor has heard horror stories like monies being removed (i.e. clawbacks) from providers with minimal notice or explanation, and with little recourse on the part of the provider.

Licensed professional counselors do join this field because we desire to help people, and many are unprepared for the difficulties that can be encountered. This is especially true for smaller groups and individual providers. An

Ombudsman's Office for Behavioral Healthcare would be beneficial to maintaining our behavioral health workforce. This is a workforce development issue.

We appreciate your consideration of our testimony and urge the committee to consider furthering this bill. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Counseling Association and all professional counselors in our state.

Respectfully,

*Dr. Sarah Evans Zalewski*

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